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ABSTRACT

The fifth Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) survey of students' attainment in English language was carried out in 1998 by two English specialists from Edinburgh University (Scotland) working with the AAP National Coordinator. Samples of students at P4, P7, and S2 were selected to be representative of students in all mainstream schools. Approximately 7000 students completed the assessments in May/June 1998. Assessment was based on the curriculum defined in the "National Guidelines: English Language 5-14," specifically on reading and writing. Assessment tasks were thematically linked and required students to employ the communication skills of reading and writing as a natural part of the work on the topic provided. Standards at P4 showed strengths in both reading and writing, with over two-thirds of the sample achieving Level B (range is from A to E). Comparisons were made between P7 and S2 only. S2 students performed significantly better than P7 on all the reading and writing tasks, although there was a difference in the percentage of students at these stages attaining the national target: at P7, 73% attained Level D or better on reading tasks and 36% were attaining Level D or better in writing tasks; at S2, 41% attained Level E or better in reading tasks and 23% attained Level E in writing tasks. Results showed that the girls are performing consistently better than the boys. In addition to assessing students' performance, the survey gathered relevant information from students and schools. (NKA)

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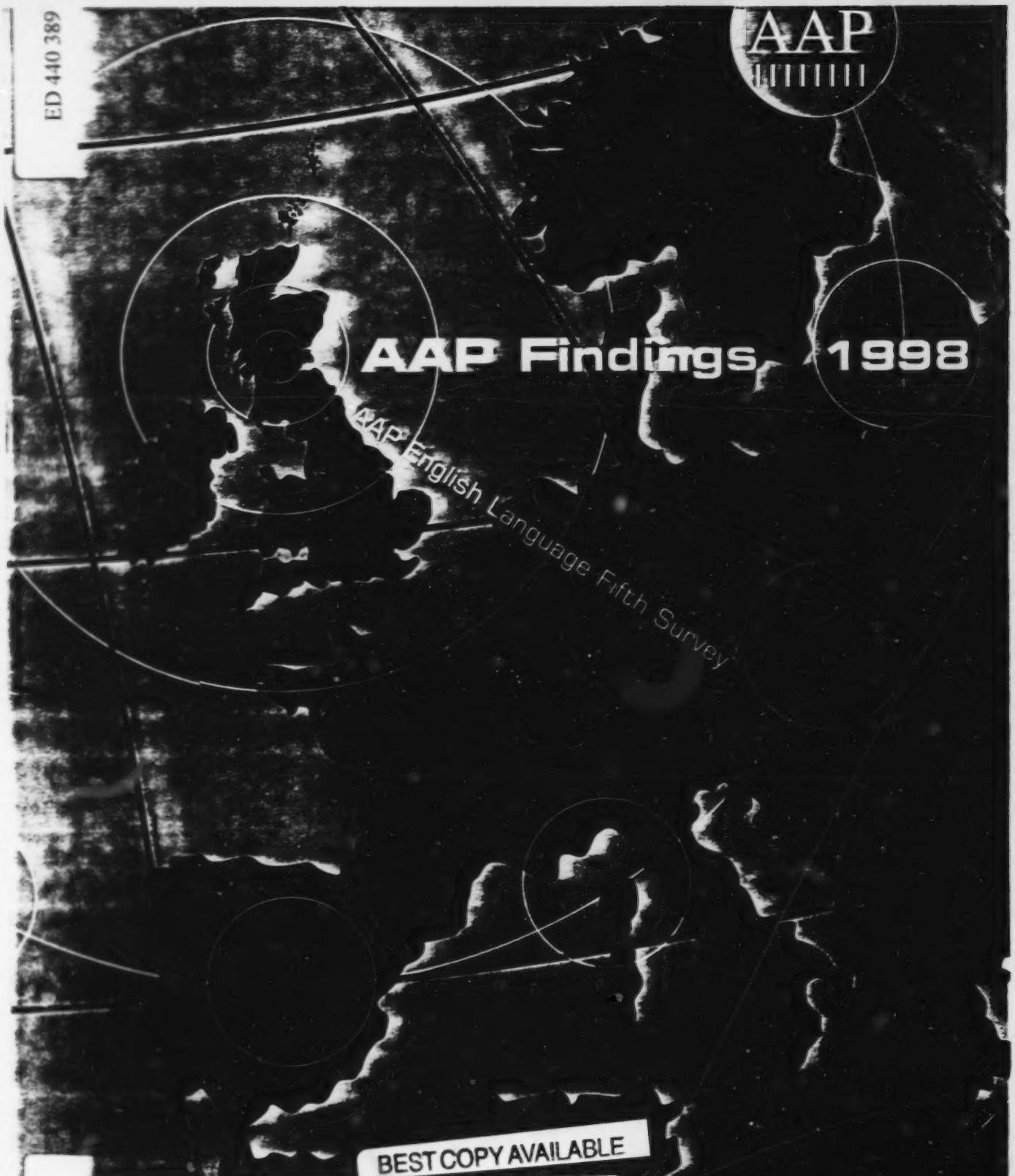

AAP Findings 1998

AAP English Language Fifth Survey

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Making it work together

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What is the Assessment of Achievement Programme?

The Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) was established by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) in 1981 to monitor the performance of pupils in particular areas of the curriculum. Since 1983 there have been regular surveys in three core curriculum areas:

- English language
- mathematics
- science.

The main objectives of the AAP are to:

- assess what pupils in P4, P7 and S2 know and can do
- provide information on performance in relation to levels defined in the *5–14 National Guidelines*
- provide evidence about changes in performance over time
- measure differences in the performances of boys and girls.

The surveys are intended to inform the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED), education authorities, teachers and other interested parties about the achievement of pupils and to indicate ways of improving teaching and learning.

The Information Pack

This booklet is part of an Information Pack on the results of the Fifth English Language Survey. The pack also includes *Feedback*, which highlights points from the survey's findings directly relevant to classroom practice. Examples of items used in the survey are also available in the pack.

Copies of the pack have been distributed to all primary and secondary schools in Scotland. Additional copies are available from the Dissemination Officer, SEED Research Unit, Area 2B, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ (0131-244-0167).

The Fifth English Language Survey

The fifth AAP survey of pupils' attainment in English Language was carried out in 1998 by two English specialists from Edinburgh University working with the AAP National Co-ordinator. Samples of pupils at P4, P7 and S2 were selected to be representative of pupils in all mainstream schools. Approximately 7000 pupils completed the assessments in May/June 1998. Assessment was based on the curriculum defined in the *National Guidelines: English Language 5–14*, specifically on reading and writing.

Each pupil completed two reading tasks followed by one writing task. The assessment tasks were thematically linked and required pupils to employ the communication skills of reading and writing as a natural part of the work on the topic provided. Some tasks from the 1995 survey were repeated in order to provide evidence on changes in performance over time.

The reading and writing tasks were designed to cover the full range of ability at each stage. The framework was planned to provide the pupils with materials that were interesting, relevant, accessible and at the same time challenging.

The performance of pupils has been reported in terms of Levels A to E as set out in the *National Guidelines*[1]. However, some questions about the precise interpretation of a level of attainment, particularly in reading, remain.

To achieve success in a reading task at a specific level, pupils had to answer correctly 60 per cent or more of those items deemed appropriate at that level. This figure was reached after much reflection and consultation. It takes account of the variety of texts and questions being used and gives weight to professional judgement about what constitutes a reasonable performance in an assessment in this type of national survey. The writing tasks were marked using the national test writing criteria. Pupils were awarded a level in each of the categories: choice and use of language; spelling; selection and organisation of ideas; and punctuation. These four levels were subsequently consolidated using national test procedures to give each pupil a grading of a single level.

[1] Since the completion of this survey, attainment targets for Level F have been formulated.

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Reading

The *National Guidelines* set out a number of strands for reading. The survey concentrated on those strands which could most appropriately be assessed in a national survey such as the AAP. Most of the items used in the survey relate to the strands *Reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft* and *Awareness of genre*.

P4

The table below indicates the percentage of P4 pupils attaining, and not attaining, Level B in each of the reading tasks.

TASK	LEVELS	
	Percentage of pupils	
Information Texts	**Below Level B**	**Level B & above**
Thunder and Lightning	28	**72**
Elsie's School	20	**80**
Goldfish	25	**75**
Wildlife Magazine	52	**48**
The Seashore	33	**67**
Narrative Texts		
Katie Morag	38	**62**
Ben	23	**77**
Macpherson	31	**69**
Hamish	39	**61**
Marooned	31	**69**

Overall performance across all reading tasks	32%	**68%**

Approach to assessment

The texts at P4, both information and narrative, were clear and uncomplicated and the majority of items were directed at determining pupils' understanding of the most important points of information, ideas, thoughts, aspects of action and behaviour of characters within the context. Some items were aimed at higher attaining pupils and examined pupils' understanding of 'main and supporting ideas' and ability to 'draw conclusions from the text', as appropriate for Level C.

Performance

For the most part even lower attaining pupils were able to demonstrate an understanding of the main ideas, whether facts from an information text or thoughts and feelings from a narrative text. Usually items assessing straightforward supporting ideas and clearly stated details caused little difficulty for confident readers. A few questions required close reading of a part of the text and some ability to draw conclusions from what had been read. Less skilled readers found these items difficult and seemed to prefer to supply a quick answer rather than taking the time to check that what they had written made sense in the context of the text.

The main difficulties seemed to arise where an answer was not immediately obvious and had to be worked at by returning to the text to check on facts or ideas. Some pupils seemed to prefer to rely on memory rather than have to read a section again to find an answer. At this stage, of course, few pupils have the ability to scan a text quickly. Less skilled readers were less sure of individual words and their understanding of the text as a whole was patchy and superficial.

Few difficulties were encountered where the wording of the question closely matched the wording of the original text. Pupils were less sure, however, when they had to understand the meaning clearly enough to recognise a synonym or adapt to a change in sentence structure. This was most clearly seen in the summary completion sections where pupils were required to demonstrate an ability to read, understand and use the ideas in the text, sometimes having to provide vocabulary of their own to recreate the meaning of the original text within the structure of the summary. Pupils able to cope consistently with these items were demonstrating a reading ability beyond Level B.

Performance did not seem to taper off towards the end of a task or in response to items pertaining to the end of the text. Even where some difficulties were encountered in the middle of a task pupils appeared to be motivated to work on, and almost all pupils were making attempts to answer right to the last question of the last section.

P7

The table below indicates the percentage of P7 pupils attaining, and not attaining, Level D in each of the reading tasks.

TASK	LEVELS	
	Percentage of pupils	
Information Texts	**Below Level D**	**Level D & above**
Storms	21	**79**
Glen Gairn	28	**72**
Slavery	28	**72**
Around the Coast	48	**52**
Kon-Tiki	27	**73**
Narrative Texts		
Shona	38	**62**
Emma and Richard	27	**73**
Finn	19	**81**
Adrift	14	**86**
Julilly	26	**74**
Kingdom by the Sea	21	**79**

Overall performance across all reading tasks	27%	**73%**

Approach to assessment

In order to assess pupils' general abilities in reading – understanding main and supporting ideas; locating details of information, thought, feelings and opinions; making inferences, summarising ideas; and making use of ideas as the writer intended – three main types of questions were used across all reading tasks. These were true, false, can't tell; multiple choice; and summary completion. All eleven reading tasks included summary completion sections with a total of 130 items. The total mean score for all summary completion was 59 per cent. The mean on these tasks was 66 per cent on the information texts and 52 per cent on narrative texts.

There were also questions designed to assess pupils' skill in recognising the genre of a piece of text, understanding specific words and phrases, identifying examples of descriptive language used to colour the setting or to create atmosphere, and distinguishing between fact and opinion.

Performance

Grasping the gist of the texts seemed to pose no particular problems for P7, with most pupils able to demonstrate that they could identify the main ideas or extract the most important pieces of information in either information or narrative texts.

Overall performance at P7 was very slightly better on information tasks than on narrative tasks. Information tasks tend to be more straightforward and while they may contain much detailed information, they require less inference, understanding of subtleties and abstract ideas, and appreciation of literary techniques than is generally looked for in the reading of narrative texts.

Many P7 pupils seemed to have a firm grasp of strategies necessary to understand the main ideas and information and are able to use these ideas when required. Problems arise when the examination of a text required by the task becomes more detailed and subtle, where a superficial understanding will not suffice and a closer, more careful reading is needed. Many appeared to lack the application to re-read a section of text to find an answer, or to check the sense of what they had written, preferring reliance on memory to the task of reading again. In addition, almost half of P7 pupils showed little appreciation of the writer's craft.

S2

The table below indicates the percentage of S2 pupils attaining, and not attaining, Level E in each of the reading tasks.

TASK	LEVELS	
	Percentage of pupils	
Information Texts	**Below Level E**	**Level E**
Storms	46	**54**
The Inspectors	56	**44**
Slavery	55	**45**
Kon-Tiki	69	**31**
Around the Coast	66	**34**
Narrative Texts		
Shona	63	**37**
Emma and Richard	63	**37**
Finn	62	**38**
Attack	46	**54**
Julilly	55	**45**
Kingdom by the Sea	67	**33**
Adrift	62	**38**

Overall performance across all reading tasks	59%	**41%**

Approach to assessment

In order to assess pupils' general reading skills, to examine their awareness of main and supporting ideas, their ability to locate detail and their use of inference, three item types were used – multiple choice; true, false, can't tell; and summary completion. In summary completion pupils are often required to use inference and generalisation, which occasionally necessitates supplying a simple generic term to summarise a number of specific ideas. Less skilled readers often find this type of question very demanding while confident readers almost always perform well. Across the twelve reading tasks at S2, all but one had a summary completion section and there were 146 items in all. The total mean score for all summary completion items was 63 per cent. On information tasks the mean in these tasks was 70 per cent and on narrative tasks the mean was 57 per cent.

Other aspects of reading – identifying the genre of the text read, distinguishing between fact and opinion, describing the feelings of characters, for example – were also assessed using a diversity of methods.

Performance

In both narrative and information tasks pupils, for the most part, were able to identify and understand main ideas and any subsidiary ideas which were central to the text. It was in the area of closer reading, where the task required pupils to look for details, to read between the lines for inference or to consider important aspects of the writer's craft, that some pupils were less able to demonstrate confident reading skills.

There are clearly S2 pupils who were readily able to demonstrate an ability to read with understanding and to use the ideas and information they have encountered in their reading. They also showed an appreciation of the writer's craft. However, where a text was dense and detailed, some pupils appeared to read superficially without real understanding, without taking time to translate words into meaning. On the tasks assessing these texts, difficulties for less skilled readers seemed to arise where the answer was not instantly obvious, and, arguably, lack of reading confidence discouraged them from re-reading a section of the text to find the answer or to check that what they had written was logical.

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Writing

The *National Guidelines* set out a number of strands for writing. The survey concentrated on Functional writing, Personal writing, Imaginative writing, Punctuation and structure, and Spelling.

Although all pupils had the input and support of teachers prior to writing and the time (and a specially provided sheet) to plan their ideas, there was no correction or redrafting opportunity and no access to a wordbank or dictionary during the writing process.

P4

The table below indicates the percentage of P4 pupils attaining, and not attaining, Level B on each of the writing tasks.

TASK	LEVELS	
	Percentage of pupils	
	Below Level B	Level B & above
Functional Writing		
School Report	28	**72**
Wildlife Magazine Article	37	**63**
Personal Writing		
Dear Ally letter	40	**60**
My Favourite Place account	28	**72**
An Invitation letter	41	**59**
Imaginative Writing		
Through the Door	35	**65**
The Great Adventure	43	**57**
The Rescue	24	**76**

Overall performance across all writing tasks	35%	**65%**

Across all eight writing tasks two thirds of P4 pupils performed at Level B or higher levels.

Although some writing tasks were more successful at P4 than others and some writing topics appealed more than others, the type of writing – functional, personal or imaginative – seemed to have little effect on the quality of writing produced. The evidence of over two thousand writing scripts suggests that, whatever their ability, the great majority of P4 pupils actually

enjoy writing. Pupils clearly entered into the spirit of the tasks and conveyed a real sense of interest and personal involvement in what they had been asked to do.

The planning page caused problems for some P4 pupils. It was clear that some pupils had not encountered such a system for noting and organising thoughts, and despite guidance from teachers, a number of pupils exhausted their energies on the planning page and failed to transfer ideas to the actual writing. Many, however, were used to planning or followed the instructions of the teacher and used the headings on the planning page effectively to organise their writing.

Of the three **functional** writing tasks, the School Report was the most successful, probably because although the audience was a fictitious stranger, the subject matter was familiar and close at hand. Pupils had little difficulty expanding on and organising ideas, and the spelling of familiar vocabulary was good. By contrast, where pupils had to write a letter of invitation to another fictitious stranger, or write about a discovery, a lack of confidence was evident. The concept of having to give an explanation so that an uninformed audience could understand the circumstances was beyond some at P4 and consequently essential information was omitted. In these cases pupils seemed to use the planning page as a worksheet where they provided short answers to the questions asked, with no links between ideas or obvious appreciation of the task as a whole. Clearly, for some, the idea of themselves as authors, rather than answerers of questions, has yet to be understood. In many cases there was little logical organisation of thoughts. Even so, pupils' keenness for the tasks was unmistakable.

Both **personal** writing tasks appealed to P4 pupils, who were keen to express plenty of ideas and opinions. The letter required that they offer sympathy and concern as well as giving a personal view and advice, while the personal account asked for an expression of feelings in response to a situation or place. Although they sometimes forgot the reason for writing, pupils had no hesitation in putting candid opinions and private thoughts on paper, a feature often missing from the personal writing of older pupils. Pupils seemed to be able to organise their writing naturally in these tasks, with personal ideas lending themselves easily to both introductory and closing sentences.

Pupils who produced good examples of **imaginative** writing often seemed to borrow ideas and techniques from their reading which were used competently to create setting, characters and action. They were aware of the need to provide a beginning, middle and end for a story. Even at this stage there were some pupils who were able to use dialogue and other story-telling strategies to good effect. Less skilled writers included much irrelevant detail in stories which were dull and lacked shape and direction. Two tasks asked pupils to use characters they had met in previous reading tasks and to continue their adventures. The more successful of these was *The Rescue* in which not only the characters but also the story line and the outcome were suggested. With this amount of support many pupils wrote well-rounded though perhaps predictable stories.

In all the writing tasks the range of proficiency in technical skills varied widely. Despite the lack of access to a wordbank or dictionary, some pupils were able to use and spell correctly even quite sophisticated vocabulary. Others seemed to use no logical spelling strategies and even the most commonly used words were inaccurately and inconsistently spelled. Punctuation patterns at this stage seemed even more erratic. Though some pupils demonstrated an awareness, for example, of the complexities of the punctuation of direct speech, there were many who seemed to have little appreciation of the need for any punctuation at all or who used it quite randomly. Some pupils were beginning to use paragraphing and to show a general awareness of the need to organise their writing.

P7

The table below indicates the percentage of P7 pupils attaining, and not attaining, Level D on each of the writing tasks.

TASK	LEVELS	
	Percentage of Pupils	
	Below Level D	Level D & above
Functional Writing		
Let's Improve	73	**27**
Coastal Herald	57	**43**
The Expedition	65	**35**
Mr. Irvine's Invitation	70	**30**
Personal Writing		
Dear Chris	54	**46**
Bravery	63	**37**
Getaway	82	**18**
Imaginative Writing		
Through the Door	49	**51**
That Night	63	**37**
Overall performance across all writing tasks	64%	**36%**

On the nine writing tasks, over one third of P7 pupils were performing at the national target, Level D, or above. Writing at this stage shows a wide range of ability and also reveals that there are a number of very promising writers. Across the three types of writing there were some pupils whose grasp of language was impressive and who have learned from their reading how to employ writing techniques to good effect. They also demonstrated that they understood the importance of organising their writing, in most cases using paragraphing appropriately.

There were four **functional** writing tasks at P7. Although finding ideas was not a problem, even when, as in *Let's Improve*, pupils had to provide ideas themselves, it was in the area of organising these points into a logical, reasoned and persuasive report or letter that the writing fell down. Many pupils seemed unaware of the need for basic introductory and concluding sentences so that it was left to the reader to work out what the writing was about. Although pupils were encouraged to make use of suggestions on the planning page to help organise their work, there was often a lack of linking between ideas and sentences or a lack of logical progression from one thought to another within a piece of writing. Many P7 pupils have not yet understood the function of paragraphing in helping to organise their work. Some pupils had difficulty adopting an appropriate register for the task they had been given and some were not

good at choosing what information or ideas to include, introducing much that was irrelevant or omitting points necessary to achieve the purpose of the writing.

In the three **personal** writing tasks at P7, there was a range of performance. In the letter written to an unknown peer, pupils seemed easily able to adopt an appropriate register and a friendly, reassuring tone. Passing on information that was familiar in circumstances they could relate to, they were able to communicate a personal involvement in the task. Writing in the other two tasks was somewhat less successful. Many pupils seemed unable to write successfully about the abstract concept of bravery, despite suggestions that they themselves might have needed such a quality in everyday situations. On the task, *Getaway*, which appeared to appeal to pupils, many wrote about their personal problems without moving to the next step of leaving these problems behind. Many P7 pupils were not able to expand thoughts and ideas of this sort, or to put possible solutions into convincing prose.

There were some promising pieces of writing produced in the two **imaginative** writing tasks. Able writers created a setting and a set of circumstances in which believable characters behaved in a convincing manner. These pupils demonstrated an awareness of the need for a story to have a shape with a beginning which gave the reader necessary information, a middle in which something happened and an ending which either brought the story to a satisfactory conclusion or deliberately left the reader hanging, wanting to read on. It was obvious that at this stage there are some pupils who have taken note of writing strategies in the course of their reading and have used them to good effect. There were some pupils, however, who felt the need for drama but who were unable to make their characters respond to situations in any convincing way. Others used much mundane and repetitive detail or unenlightening dialogue which added nothing to the narrative.

Although there were undoubtedly some pupils at P7 who were able to demonstrate a firm grasp of the mechanical skills of spelling and punctuation, there were many who seemed to have failed to appreciate the need for these skills as a means of improving their writing. Spelling ranged from the almost faultless to the almost incomprehensible, with much carelessness in between. Only a few pupils seemed to have mastered the punctuation of direct speech although most realised that some 'speech marks' were needed. However, even basic inclusion of full stops, commas and capital letters was often haphazard, and apostrophes seemed to appear wherever there was an 's' or not at all. The concepts of linking ideas and of organising ideas into paragraphs in order to help the reader understand the thinking of the writer was not yet understood by some P7 pupils. Although some of these problems would probably be eliminated in the normal course of redrafting, it seems clear that some pupils are not aware of the importance of attention to detail in order to communicate their ideas effectively to a reader.

S2

The table below indicates the percentage of S2 pupils attaining, and not attaining, Level E on each of the writing tasks.

TASK	LEVELS	
	Percentage of pupils	
	Below Level E	Level E
Functional Writing		
Let's Improve	78	**22**
A Case for Change	84	**16**
Coastal Herald	78	**22**
Mr. Irvine's Invitation	69	**31**
Personal Writing		
Dear Chris	77	**23**
Bravery	79	**21**
Getaway	70	**30**
Imaginative Writing		
Through the Door	80	**20**
That Night	77	**23**

Overall performance across all writing tasks	77%	**23%**

On the nine writing tasks included in the survey at S2, just under one quarter of pupils overall were deemed to be performing at Level E or above. Many of these showed a flair for presenting ideas in writing with both an awareness of the writer's craft and an ability to make effective use of it when required.

Although performance was slightly better on some tasks than on others, and it is obvious that some specific writing tasks appeal to young people more than others, the type of writing, i.e. functional, personal or imaginative, did not appear to affect performance to any great degree.

In most cases pupils were not short of ideas in the **functional** writing tasks, whether they were recommending changes to their school or community, writing a newspaper article, or inviting a guest to school. Most showed an awareness of an appropriate style for a newspaper article and adopted a polite tone for a letter to an unknown adult, but many were clearly at a loss for the correct register when trying to present ideas and arguments in a report, often resorting to a conversational rather than formal tone. In these tasks where organisation and clear

presentation of arguments, events or practical arrangements were of considerable importance, it seemed that many pupils had failed to keep the purpose and audience firmly in mind and consequently their writing rambled and contained a lot of irrelevant detail. Many pupils made no use of paragraphing to clarify and to lend structure, and many also ignored the necessity of a suitable introduction and conclusion. Of the four functional writing tasks, *Mr. Irvine's Invitation* seemed the most successful, possibly because the letter form provided an external structure and the content lent itself less to rambling thoughts.

There were competent pieces in all three **personal** writing tasks where pupils clearly described a situation and the feelings or views it evoked. The majority of pupils used an appropriate register for writing to an unknown peer and there were many enthusiastic, chatty letters offering information, reassurance and friendship. The concrete audience and familiar situation gave pupils a chance to empathise, and the letter form again provided structure. The other two tasks had no concrete audience. Many pupils found the concept of bravery somewhat difficult to reflect on in the abstract. The purpose of expressing their own thoughts and feelings about bravery was forgotten where pupils felt they had no real personal experience to draw on. The personal task pupils responded to most creatively was *Getaway*, in which the places and situations described differed widely but the writing often suggested genuine feelings and real personal responses. Less skilled writers did not have the language skills to create a convincing context and were unable to engage the reader's emotions or to express their own.

It is often with imaginative writing that pupils seem least confident. In the two **imaginative** writing tasks there were some entertaining stories in which the authors had used their knowledge of the writer's craft to create setting, atmosphere and characters which interacted convincingly. These pupils appreciated that a story must have a coherent shape with a beginning setting the scene, a middle including development of action and/or character and possible turning point, and a satisfactory ending. Many pupils without this understanding wrote narrative which had a lot of insignificant detail but little point. One major problem with the imaginative writing tasks was in the use of dialogue which was often tedious and irrelevant and was seldom well punctuated. Of these two tasks, *That Night* was slightly more successful, possibly because the setting and characters had already been established and pupils had only to continue with the next stage of the story.

There are a number of technical skills S2 pupils have not yet mastered; or perhaps they need to develop a greater awareness of their importance. Many pupils appeared unfamiliar with the spelling of even the most frequently used words. Even the most basic punctuation involving the correct use of commas, capital letters and full stops was often inadequate, while the slightly more challenging punctuation of direct speech and the use of apostrophes was frequently completely lacking. Pupils seemed unaware that punctuation, linking and paragraphing can improve writing considerably by helping to give it shape and structure.

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Comparisons

A key feature of the AAP surveys is that a number of comparisons are drawn. These are summarised below.

Performance between stages

Comparisons were made between P7 and S2 only. S2 pupils performed significantly better than P7 on all the reading and writing tasks, although there was a difference in the percentage of pupils at these stages attaining the national target: at P7 73 per cent attained Level D or better on reading tasks and 36 per cent were attaining Level D or better in writing tasks; at S2 41 per cent attained Level E or better in reading tasks and 23 per cent attained Level E in writing tasks.

Performance over time

At each stage a number of tasks used in 1995 were used again in 1998. The table below shows the comparison of 1998 results with performance on the same tasks in 1995.

	P4	P7	S2
Reading	**Improvement** one narrative text.	No change	**Improvement** one information text.
Writing	No change	**Improvement** on two tasks, personal and imaginative.	**Improvement** on two tasks, functional and imaginative.

At all stages performances either remained stable or showed some improvement compared with 1995. At P4 there was an improvement on one narrative reading task. At P7 performance on two of the three writing tasks had improved. At S2 performance showed slight improvements in both reading and writing.

Performance by gender

The results show that the girls are performing consistently better than the boys. P4 girls performed significantly better on four of the ten reading tasks and six of the eight writing tasks. P7 girls performed significantly better on four of the ten reading tasks and eight of the nine writing tasks. S2 girls were performing significantly better on nine of the twelve readings tasks and on all but one of the nine writing tasks.

Information from schools

In addition to assessing pupils' performance the survey gathered relevant information from pupils and schools. Some of the findings are given below.

Pupil questionnaire

- boys favoured reading comics and girls poems and magazines
- pupils' pleasure in reading decreased from P4 to S2. Relatively little time was spent reading out of school, though girls did more than boys
- writing was less popular than reading, particularly for the boys
- most pupils seemed confident in using some common features of writing
- almost all S2 pupils thought English was important for university entrance but a majority thought they had too many English periods in school
- most pupils enjoyed school and felt safe there although this did decrease from P4 to S2.

School questionnaire

Curriculum and classroom organisation

- time allocation varied dramatically between primary and secondary; at P4 and P7 84 per cent of schools spent more than 225 minutes per week on English language; at S2 87 per cent of schools spent less than 225 minutes per week on English language work
- primary teachers used group work most frequently, while whole-class teaching was favoured by secondary teachers.

Aspects of teaching and learning

- a wide range of approaches was used for teaching reading
- all stages favoured the use of class discussion prior to the work and teacher evaluation as the most frequently used teaching approaches to writing
- preparing rough drafts and redrafting of spelling were high priorities for secondary and P7 classes.

Resources

- core reading schemes and dictionaries were the most frequently used resource in primary while in secondary the emphasis was on teacher-generated materials and fiction texts.

Learning support

- all stages offered learning support; primary schools worked with groups and/or individuals; over half the secondary schools favoured co-operative teaching as well as individual pupil support.

Primary–Secondary liaison

- all schools agreed the most established type of liaison was the transfer of information on the attainment of pupils. The next most established forms were secondary visits to primary and discussion of resources.

Homework

- the average time per week spent on English language homework at the primary stage was just over 70 minutes; at secondary it was just under one hour.

Key findings

- Standards at P4 show strengths in both reading and writing with over two thirds of the sample achieving Level B.
- Almost three quarters of the P7 pupils were achieving Level D for reading. Less than half, 36 per cent, were achieving Level D for writing though nearly 40 per cent were working towards this level.
- At S2 41 per cent were achieving Level E for reading with a further 40 per cent at Level D. For most pupils, attainment in writing was below Level E. Just less than one quarter of pupils achieved the target with just under 40 per cent assessed at Level D.
- Compared with 1995 there were slight improvements in reading at P4, writing at P7 and reading and writing at S2.
- Girls performed consistently better than boys.

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